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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 002102

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: FARDC ENGAGES HEAVILY ARMED MILITIAS IN ITURI

REF: KINSHASA 1998

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (C) The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), with air and other logistical support from MONUC troops, launched Operation Eden December 21 against militia elements in the northeastern Ituri District. MONUC sources report operations are being directed against the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) and forces led by militia leader Peter Karim in the area of Fataki. A second offensive, Operation Edifice, was simultaneously launched against militia elements of the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) near Boga, also in Ituri. MONUC officials said they expect fighting to last at least a couple of weeks. The aim of the operations is to eliminate the continuing presence of local militias and to kill or capture militia leaders in the region. (Note: The two Ituri operations are in addition to a separate operation against ADF/NALU currently taking place in North Kivu and being reported septel. End note.)

2. (C) MONUC's head of office in Bunia said resistance from Karim's forces has been particularly fierce in several days of fighting against FARDC troops. Reports from the field indicate militias are using rocket launchers and other heavy military equipment against government forces. MONUC sources said Karim is fighting harder because recent FARDC operations against his troops have significantly weakened his ability to conduct illegal cross-border trade for weapons and money.

3. (C) MONUC officials reported that FARDC troops captured the Karim stronghold of Nioka (about 50 miles north of Bunia) on December 25. FARDC and MONUC troops are now chasing dispersed militia elements toward the Ugandan border and have taken control of the territory. During the fighting at Nioka, the FARDC captured two of Karim's bodyguards. MONUC officials said they are awaiting their transfer to Bunia for interrogation. Karim himself, according to MONUC sources, reportedly fled Nioka toward the border.

4. (C) The MRC is also believed to be receiving military assistance from Uganda. MONUC sources said the presence of heavy equipment indicated the MRC is getting arms from external sources. In addition, a cache of ammunition recovered from an MRC camp near the Ugandan border is reported to have a Ugandan flag on it. MONUC officials are awaiting further verification of the bag's origins and contents. The FARDC also captured a truck carrying tropical wood during its operations, and arrested three Ugandan civilians who were transporting the material.

5. (C) In Boga, FRPI elements have posed less of a military challenge, according to MONUC. The FARDC, backed by Bangladeshi and Moroccan peacekeepers, have established total area domination in the area and are pursuing militia remnants as well. FRPI militias have reportedly fled into the forests to escape fighting and to regroup.

6. (C) To date, 11 FARDC soldiers have been killed in the fighting -- nine in operations around Boga, one near Fataki, and another during operations in Nioka. MONUC officials cannot give precise numbers as to the number of militia killed, but estimate several dozens have likely died.

7. (C) Comment: Even though Operations Eden and Edifice were postponed so as not to disrupt the December 18 constitutional referendum, the operations indicate the FARDC's continued desire and ability to deal with the security threat posed by militias in Ituri. The MRC and Peter Karim are among the last major threats to establishing peace in the region, and their capability to threaten local populations has deteriorated as the FARDC, backed by MONUC, has taken the fight to them. However, reports of more heavily armed militias is worrisome, as it will test the resolve of FARDC forces who have thus far encountered opponents who are less well-equipped. In addition, if reports of assistance from Uganda are proven true, it will undoubtedly exacerbate already tense relations between the GDRC and GOU. End comment.

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